

Ask A Vet: Hip Dysplasia a Problem for Young and Old

Sunday, November 24, 2013

Dear Dr. Weldy's,

My 15 month old Rottweiler is showing signs of pain in his hind legs. I have heard of hip dysplasia being common in large dogs. Is it possible in a dog this young?

Dear Reader,

Unfortunately, it is a real possibility in your dog. Hip dysplasia refers to the abnormal development and formation of the "ball and socket" joint that makes up the hip. In a normal hip, the ball or femoral head fits tightly into the socket or acetabulum. In a hip showing dysplasia, the head of the femur and hip socket are more loosely associated, allowing for slippage as the joint moves and rotates. Over the dog's lifetime this creates extra wear and tear on the joint and often leads to arthritis and pain. Depending on the severity of the condition, some dogs may begin showing signs as early as 6 to 18 months of age. We typically see hip dysplasia cause problems in two different age groups. The first one is the older dog who has dealt with low level dysplasia its whole life and finally arthritis starts causing considerable pain. The second is that young adult pup with such severe dysplasia that the joint is actually unstable and nearly coming out of socket. The latter obviously is much more difficult to deal with and carries a worse prognosis.

So why do dogs get hip dysplasia? The short answer is that it is genetic. Because of this we have an opportunity to try and prevent it by only breeding dogs that have been shown not to have hip dysplasia. Fortunately, we have regulatory organizations who can certify or fail breeding dogs based on hip x-rays sent in by the dog's veterinarian. It breaks my heart to see a young dog who should be in its prime be crippled by hip dysplasia. By only breeding dogs with certified hips we can reduce the number of animals with this disease.

If you suspect a hip problem with your dog it is best to have it checked by your veterinarian. He or she may take x-rays along with examining your pet to best diagnose hip dysplasia. So what can be done once your pet is diagnosed? This depends heavily on the severity and age of your dog. Often anti inflammatory drugs and supplements can be used to treat mild forms of this disease and associated arthritis. More severe cases may require surgery including but not limited to a total hip replacement. Although expensive, these procedures are becoming more commonplace and successful every year.

-Dr. Justin Sellon